

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ROME 12181 01 OF 02 262326Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 /059 W
-----087770 262342Z /63

R 261725Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6105
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL PALERMO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 12181

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJECT: THE PSI AFTER A YEAR UNDER THE "FORTY-YEAR OLDS"

REF: ROME 8852

SUMMARY: THE FIRST YEAR OF BETTINO CRAXI'S SECRETARYSHIP OF THE PSI HAS BEEN LARGELY DISAPPOINTING, AS HE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO PROVIDE THE PARTY WITH UNITY, FIRM POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, OR RELIEF FROM THE FACTIONAL STRIFE WHICH HAS LONG WEAKENED THE PSI. THE PARTY HAS DRIFTED TO THE LEFT WHILE CONTINUING IN ITS ROLE AS THE GADFLY OF ITALIAN POLITICS, AND ITS PUBLIC IMAGE HAS BEEN TARNISHED BY CONTINUED MANEUVERING FOR PERSONAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE AMONG THE "FORTY-YEAR OLDS" WHO NOW HEAD THE PARTY. CRAXI HAS BEEN FORCED TO COMPROMISE CONTINUALLY WITH THE LEFT IN ORDER TO RETAIN THE LITTLE AUTHORITY THAT HE STILL HAS. A NATIONAL CONGRESS HAS BEEN CALLED FOR THE FIRST PART OF 1978 (A YEAR AHEAD OF SCHEDULE) TO "CLARIFY" THE PARTY LINE. IN THE MEANTIME, THE PROSPECT THAT THE PSI MIGHT
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PAGE 02 ROME 12181 01 OF 02 262326Z

PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE POLITICAL ROLE
IS DIM, WHILE AN EARLY RETURN TO SOME SORT OF COALITION
WITH THE DC IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN JULY 1976, AFTER A POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE JUNE
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, FRANCESCO DE MARTINO WAS OUSTED
AS PSI PARTY SECRETARY AND REPLACED BY A COMPROMISE CAN-

DIDATE, BETTINO CRAXI, A MODERATE FROM THE SMALL, SO-CALLED "AUTONOMIST" FACTION OF PARTY PRESIDENT PIETRO NENNI. ENRICO MANCA (A FORMER LIEUTENANT OF DE MARTINO) AND CLAUDIO SIGNORILE (A LEADER OF THE RADICAL LEFT FACTION OF RICCARDO LOMBARDI) WERE INSTALLED AS DEPUTY PARTY SECRETARIES. HOWEVER, THE PARTY CONGRESS WHICH OUSTED DE MARTINO REAFFIRMED HIS BASIC POLICY LINE, REJECTING ANY GOVERNMENTAL ALLIANCE WITH THE DC THAT DID NOT INCLUDE THE PCI. SADDLED WITH A POLITICAL LINE THAT HAD ALREADY FAILED AND TWO HIGHLY AMBITIOUS DEPUTIES, CRAXI BEGAN HIS TERM AS SECRETARY FACING ENORMOUS OBSTACLES AND HIS FIRST YEAR HAS BEEN FOR THE MOST PART DISAPPOINTING.

2. WHEN ELECTED, CRAXI HAD NO SUBSTANTIAL PERSONAL FOLLOWING IN THE PARTY OUTSIDE OF HIS NATIVE MILAN, BUT HIS FAILURE, IN A YEAR AS PARTY SECRETARY, TO ESTABLISH HIS OWN POWER BASE WITHIN THE PSI IS NONETHELESS REMARKABLE. HE HAS ATTEMPTED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO CHALLENGE MANCA AND SIGNORILE FOR THE BACKING OF THE PSI LEFT, AND IN THE PROCESS HAS SACRIFICED MUCH OF THE RIGHTWING SUPPORT WHICH WAS ESSENTIAL TO HIS BID FOR THE POST OF PARTY SECRETARY A YEAR AGO.

3. CURRENTLY THE PRIME CONTENDERS FOR CRAXI'S JOB ARE MANCA AND SIGNORILE. THE FORMER HAS CHALLENGED

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PAGE 03 ROME 12181 01 OF 02 262326Z

CRAXI'S AUTHORITY ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS (SEE REFTTEL) BUT HAS FAILED IN ATTEMPTS TO SECURE A TACTICAL ALLIANCE EITHER WITH OTHER FORMER FOLLOWERS OF DE MARTINO OR WITH THE RIGHTWING MANCINI FACTION. HE HAS THUS FAR SUCCEEDED ONLY IN MAKING CRAXI'S POSITION UNCOMFORTABLE. SIGNORILE HAS BEEN MORE CIRCUMSPECT, BUT HIS INFLUENCE IS EVIDENT IN CRAXI'S RELUCTANT ACCEPTANCE OF THE "ALTERNATIVE OF THE LEFT", A PCI/PSI GOVERNMENT COALITION, AS THE PARTY'S THEORETICAL GOAL. THOUGH CRAXI'S SWING TO THE LEFT HAS MUTED SOME OF THE LEFTWING CRITICISM, IT HAS ALSO SERVED TO REMOVE HIM FROM THAT TENUOUS MIDDLE GROUND WHICH HE PROFESSED TO REPRESENT, LINKING THE PSI'S MODERATE, REFORMIST RIGHT WING AND THE NOW-ASCENDANT RADICAL LEFT. ALIENATION OF THE PSI'S RIGHT WING, COMBINED WITH THE ONGOING POWER STRUGGLE IN THE LEADERSHIP, HAS PRECLUDED ANY SERIOUS EFFORT TO PRODUCE A UNIFIED AND COHESIVE PARTY PROGRAM. AS A RESULT, THE PARTY HAS

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PAGE 01 ROME 12181 02 OF 02 262335Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 12181

CONTINUED TO BE THE GADFLY OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL
SCENE, PLAYING A REACTIVE AND LARGELY NEGATIVE ROLE.
PERFUNCTORY EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO COVER THE REALITIES
OF THE STRUGGLE FOR PERSONAL POWER IN THE PSI LEADERSHIP
WITH A VENEER OF POLITICAL SLOGANS AND RHETORIC, BUT THE
IMAGE OF THE PARTY HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN DAMAGED. INDEED,
AT ONE POINT DURING THE ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE WHICH MARKED
THE MAY 25-27 CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING NENNI, IN SUP-
PORTING CRAXI, ADMINISHED THE OTHER "FORTY-YEAR OLDS"
FOR CREATING A SPECTACLE WITH THEIR PUBLIC SQUABBLES AND
PURSUIT OF POWER.

4. ON THE EVE OF THE JULY 21 PARTY DIRECTORATE MEETING
BOTH MANCA AND SIGNORILE ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WOULD FAVOR
AN "EXTRAORDINARY PARTY CONGRESS" TO EXAMINE THE POLITICAL
SITUATION AND "CLARIFY" THE PARTY LINE. CRAXI HAS
RESISTED PRESSURES FOR AN "EXTRAORDINARY" CONGRESS IN
RECENT MONTHS, APPARENTLY FEARING THAT SUCH A CONVOCA-
TION WOULD RESULT IN FURTHER CHALLENGES TO HIS AUTHORITY. ON
JULY 21, HOWEVER, CRAXI CHANGED TACTICS AND, WITH NENNI'S
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 ROME 12181 02 OF 02 262335Z

SUPPORT, OPENED THE DIRECTORATE MEETING WITH A CALL FOR
AN "EARLY NATIONAL CONGRESS", STATING SPECIFICALLY THAT
THE TERM "EXTRAORDINARY" WOULD NOT ACCURATELY DESCRIBE
WHAT HE HAD IN MIND. HE ADDED THAT AN "EARLY" CONGRESS

WAS JUSTIFIED BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL CHANGES WHICH HAVE
TAKEN PLACE OVER THE PAST YEAR. THE PSI DIRECTORATE
AGREED (WITH TWO ABSTENTIONS AND TWO NEGATIVE VOTES
FROM THE MANCINI RIGHT) TO CONVENE THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
IN SEPTEMBER IN ORDER TO BEGIN PREPARATIONS FOR A PARTY
CONGRESS EARLY IN 1978.

5. RECENT REGIONAL AND PROVINCIAL CONGRESSES HAVE SUB-
STANTIALLY CONFIRMED THE ASCENDANCY OF THE PSI LEFT,
AND BOTH THE PRE-CONGRESS MANEUVERING AND THE CONGRESS
ITSELF ARE LIKELY TO CONSIST IN THE MAIN OF A FURTHER
DEBILITATING POWER STRUGGLE. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES
MAJOR NEW INITIATIVES ARE UNLIKELY. FOR THE
FORESEEABLE FUTURE THE PSI WILL IN ALL PROBABILITY
CONTINUE IN ITS NEGATIVE, REACTIVE ROLE AND ANY SERIOUS
POSSIBILITY OF A PSI RETURN TO SOME
SORT OF COALITION WITH THE DC IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY.
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